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ABSTRACT

This paper describes some aspects of the transition taking place in Czech educational efforts since the "Velvet Revolution" of 1989, particularly changes in the teaching of civic education in the schools. The paper takes the position that governments find it important to mold new generations in areas of civic responsibility, whatever the nature of those governments, however controlling or free they may be. The paper is based on exploratory interviews with students, faculty, and administrators at the University of South Bohemia and at the Ministry of Education in 1992-94, as well as a limited review of the literature. A section on education under Communism describes the 40 year effort to remold Czechoslovak education in the image and likeness of the Soviet Union's education system and following the principles of international communism. The next several sections describe the transitions to a post-communist educational system in basic education, secondary education, higher education and civic education. A section devoted to the transition period following the revolution goes into greater detail on the content of a new civic education which is seen as having the goal of providing students with the skills for individual responsibility and social participation, with ethical values, and with the ability to think critically. A final section offers recommendations for planning civic education curricula. (Contains 15 references.) (JB)

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CIVIC EDUCATION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC[1]

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This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the Marriott Hotel, Orlando, Florida, November 2-5, 1995. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

CIVIC EDUCATION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC[1]

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When Vaclav Havel, President of the then Czechoslovakia, spoke at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, February 4, 1992, he spoke of a new way to think through modern civic problems, a break away from positivism:

> It is my proud conviction that we have to release from the sphere of private whim such forces as a natural, unique and unrepeatable experience of the world, an elementary sense of justice, the ability to see things as others do, a sense of transcendental responsibility, archetypal wisdom, good taste, courage, compassion, and faith in the importance of particular measures that do not aspire to be a universal key to salvation. Such forces must be rehabilitated . . . We must try harder to understand than explain. The way forward is not in the mere construction of universal systematic solutions to be applied to reality from the outside; it is also in seeking to get to the heart of reality through personal experience.

The purpose of this paper is to describe some aspects of the transition taking place in Czech educational efforts since the velvet revolution of 1989. The focus will be on changes in the teaching of civic education in the schools and related issues in civic education. The paper is a preliminary report of ongoing research on civic education.

The paper is primarily descriptive in nature. It is illustrative of the position that governments find it important to mold the new generations in areas of civic responsibility, whatever the nature of those governments, however controlling or free they may be. It is suggested that what differs among governments is how the civic education is carried out, not whether it is seen as useful or necessary.

The paper is based on exploratory interviews with students, faculty and administrators at the University of South Bohemia and at the Ministry of Education in the period 1992-1994, as well as a limited review of the literature available on the subject. The documentary analysis involved extracting data from published reports and from notes of interviews.

EDUCATION UNDER COMMUNISM

The Communist Party spent forty years attempting to remold Czechoslovak education in the image and likeness of the Soviet Union and the principles of international communism. The Party not only controlled all levels of education, but also used the institutions as instruments for controlling and reeducating student minds to create the "new communist man." The government, under party direction, rigidly centralized and politicized education in terms of institutional governance, resource allocation, teaching staff, students and access, curriculum, and planning. (Koucky, 1990, Yazdgerdi, 1990).

Teachers under communism were under pressure to slant their teaching to Marxist-Leninist dogma. All teaching and scientific activities were based on the so-called scientific world outlook of Marxism-Leninism. Also, anyone not showing public support for the regime was under constant threat of dismissal. There was always the possibility of informers in classes or among colleagues, and they could report on the presence of incorrect thinking and teaching.

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[1]Paper prepared for the 20th annual conference of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, November 2-5, 1995, Orlando, FL.

Evaluations before 1989 were subordinated to the ideological and political doctrine of the Communist Party, which held that the Party would set objectives and principal goals in the field of education. Education was evaluated by inspection. The aim was to control at all levels of management the implementation of policy, the contents, methods and results of educational work. As Harach, Kotasek, Koucky, and Hendrichova (1991) point out, the form of inspection was not respected. Any assessment of the work of teachers and administrators was exclusively the domain of the Party.

Czech students viewed civic education as one of their most boring subjects. For years it was used as a tool of indoctrination of communist truth, and for purposes of political control. Thus, students regarded Civics as a boring subject, not worthy of their respect or attention.

These are the legacies from the communist era that persist. Very few persons alive today lived under, or remember, life before communist control. No one working in education today worked in the schools before communism. Very few people remember or experienced life as adults under any government before 1948. Thus it might be expected that people would have become used to some aspects of the system they grew up with and found familiar. However, teachers, scholars and students did not anticipate that the strength of this historical influence would be so strong.

The problem is not unique to the Czech Republic; in fact it seems to be an issue throughout the former Communist world, including Marxist China (Sannikov, 1995; Tibbitts, 1995). In a somewhat different form, the issue is also of critical importance to educators in the West (IBE, 1995; Quigley, Buchanan, & Bahmueller, 1991; Janowitz, M., 1983; Torney-Purta, Oppenheim, and Farnen, 1975).

The negative influence of the communist regime, which still persists in Czech society, also led to a lack of common moral values. Thus for the Czechs, the issue is not only the lack of values of citizenship and democracy, but also an absence of individual values. Thus one focus of civic education is the teaching of values (Dostalova, 1993).

BASIC EDUCATION.

Primary schools are called basic schools, and their function is to provide the foundations of general education, including the intellectual, moral, esthetics, physical, and work education of students and prepare them for secondary schools. Basic schools are nine year, divided into two levels, with increasing specialization at the second level, covering ages 11-15. In recent years the basic school has changed. Schoolmasters power has grown, and teachers have greater freedom to teach, to choose curricula, and texts. The gradual transformation of the basic schools seek to change the overall school atmosphere. Pupils are allowed again to attend religion classes.

SECONDARY EDUCATION.

These are of three types: gymnasia, specialized, and vocational secondary schools. Students are enrolled in secondary school on the basis of admission exams. Girls make up 60% of the enrollment. Admission decisions are made by the Headmaster. Graduation depends on four years of successful work and the passing of final exams (IIE, 1992).

Gymnasia (academic high schools preparing for the university) have undergone several transitions. Before 1948 they were like the classical academic tradition of the Austrian-German Gymnasia. After the revolution, communist orthodoxy required that they become general education schools of the Soviet type. From 1984 on they began providing vocational education as well, aiming to achieve the classless society.

Starting with school year 1991, as a result of the greater authority given to the Headmasters, there began to be significant diversity in the schools, and the curricula is now not so easily regulated or described. Uniformity is out. One example of the new diversity and innovation is the five year bi-lingual gymnasium. There are still final exams in the gymnasia however, in two required areas: Czech language and literature, and a foreign language; and two other academic subjects of student choice.

Specialized secondary schools have a tradition going back to the 18th century. They escaped many of the negative changes of communism. They prepare specialist such as nurses, technicians, computer experts, secretaries, employees in the tourist and other businesses that require foreign languages, artistic vocations, agricultural and forestry vocations, librarians, and so forth. Some students do go on to higher education, and they are legally permitted to do so, but the admission process and the goals of the students greatly limit the numbers. Some special schools have five or six years of instruction, e.g. conservatories for the performing arts.

Secondary vocational schools prepare for an occupation and are practically oriented. They do not prepare for the university, but for job training and general education. These secondary schools enroll over half the students. Some curricula are less than four years in length. Where the student successfully completes four years education, he or she completes the secondary curriculum and is a graduate. The education is similar to the specialized secondary school but more practically directed. Students who apply to less than four year curricula are admitted on the basis of completing basic school; others must also pass admissions exams and be tested and admitted before entering secondary education (Harbison, 1991; IIE, 1992).

Originally the humanities were an important part of the curricula of the gymnasia. During the communist decades the classical humanistic subjects and modern social sciences, including civic education, were reduced in the curriculum. Whatever remained was deformed by a Marxist-Leninist version of social science. In fact, one can say that these subjects hardly existed in last decade of communism. Humanistic subjects, especially civic education, had no prestige and they were little taught (Dostalova, 1993).

HIGHER EDUCATION

All teaching and scientific activities were based on the so-called scientific world outlook of Marxism-Leninism, Party policy and methodology for all sciences. In what was the Soviet equivalent of civic education, compulsory Marxism-Leninism classes made up a substantial part of the curriculum. In addition, the higher education system was highly militarized. Military departments were introduced and male students were trained as reserve officers. Training took almost 20% of their time in the first two years. In addition, a short term in the army was obligatory (Harach et al., 1991).

The Communist Party particularly controlled the social sciences to ensure that the curriculum was consistent with Party dogma. Party membership was often a condition for getting a teaching job. Most of the curricular offerings suffered from a lack of up to date content, an elimination of content that did not fit party dogma, a lack of contact with science and professionalism in more advance countries, and an outdated technology (Harach et al., 1991).

Access to higher education was controlled, and became an instrument of political pressure on citizens. Political criteria included party membership of the parents or the applicant, proclaimed loyalty to the communist state, and non-religious beliefs. The government used the children of the regime's critics and opponents as hostages, denying qualified applicants access because of their parents political beliefs.

The entrance procedures evolved into an extensive system of corruption, interventions, and protectionism. In addition, ministries set the number of students who could be enrolled according to five year plans' projections of the demand for graduates. Students were often forced to study in areas of little or no interest if they wished to gain access to higher education (Harach et al., 1991). Thus, the behaviors of the regime were also lessons in civic education of the harshest kind.

At present access is based on the results of secondary school study and written and oral exams given by universities, which now have control over admissions, as well as over curriculum and the number of places that will be open each year in each department. Students may apply to several universities, but each application takes a fee. So now students may choose their course of study and university, but at a price. They still may have to study in an area of their second or third choice if their first choice, e.g. medicine, is too competitive for them to gain access.

In the process of subverting education, debasing the humanities and social sciences, and elevating the Academies of Science, pedagogical faculties were reduced to an even lower status than before, subjected by the communists to special subversion and monitoring. Because they trained teachers, and thus were seen as instruments of political indoctrination, teacher training institutes and their curricula were the most heavily politicized and controlled. Politically correct, but otherwise inadequate persons, were given leadership positions in the institutes. Teacher training was modelled on the Soviet system and, as in the social sciences, subverted as a tool of the Party, and subordinated to Party interest (CHES, 1992; Harach et al., 1991).

Less than 15% of those eligible actually gained access to higher education in the recent past. The great fear of the communists was intellectual unemployment, so the five year plans severely restricted and channeled admission. Even since 1989 the proportion of students in the age cohort 20-24 is among the lowest in Europe. The proportion of full time student as a percentage of the 20-24 age cohort has fluctuated since 1960, but it has been falling since 1980, when it was 17.5%. It was 13.9% in 1992. Since 1986 there has been a gradual increase in the number of students enrolled, but this has failed to increase the proportion of the age cohort enrolled. The situation is likely to get worse in the near term because of the rapidly increasing size of the age cohort and the apparently inelastic supply of places in higher education (Hendrichova, 1992).

CIVIC EDUCATION

The major challenge of civic education is to teach young citizens to live with one another peacefully, responsibly, cooperatively, accepting and valuing justice and diversity, and cherishing the historical ideas and values of democracy. Forty years of communism left a legacy of using civic education in the schools to instill the values of "the new communist man" and obedience to the party and the state. Also, during these years and even going back to the end of the 1930's, the development of the social sciences were isolated from the innovations in the Western world. The result has been that the communist indoctrination of civic education was eliminated after the revolution of 1989, and a transition is being sought to a more appropriate civic education curriculum, designed to give students an understanding of democracy and identify with the values of a democratic society needs to be developed. The lack of knowledge in the innovations in civic education has delayed the development of the new civic education program.

One of the problems of re-introducing civic education in the schools is the lack of democratic practices, an inheritance from the communist regime. Teachers, students, and even scholars never suspected that this influence would be so strong, since the tradition of humanity and democracy is so much a part of the cultural background of Czechs.

Many Czechs agree that the central aim of civic education is to provide students with the skills for individual responsibility and social participation. The goal of social science teaching is to provide pupils with an understanding of the principles of a democratic society and to identify with the fundamental values of a democracy. Activities in the civics curriculum should help students to think critically, listen with discernment, and communicate with precision. Actually, a tradition exists in Czech culture for humanistic and democratic content in education, and those values can be incorporated into the school environment again. The long term isolation of Czechoslovakia from the developments in the social sciences that have taken place in the West has resulted in a stunted development of civic education (Dostalova, 1993; Patrick, 1994).

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TRANSITIONAL PERIOD

After 1989 it was clear that the communist version of civic education was not acceptable, and it would have to be replaced. There were those who wanted to reactivate the curriculum of the traditional gymnasium of fifty or a hundred years ago. While many lay persons still believe that this would solve today's educational problems, professionals (and many students) generally look to a curriculum that is related to the needs of modern society, one that would be useful to young people today.

Teachers and academics have begun discussing the possible content of a new civic education curriculum. Participants in these discussions have agreed that the central aim of civic education is to provide to students the skills for individual responsibility and responsible social participation, including the ability to modify their own behavior according to their own moral principles. The goal is to provide an understanding of the fundamental values of a democracy. Extracurricular activities, based on civics curriculum, should help students to think critically, listen with discernment, and communicate with precision (Dostalova, 1993).

Crucial to this process is the encouragement of students to recognize values, to distinguish between individual, social, and philosophical dimensions of civic education, and to analyze how people actually live by their values. Effective citizenship requires an individual understanding of the value of human rights in order that citizens protect them against those prepared to take them away. There is a cultural tradition of humanity and democracy in education, going back to Comenius, but these values have to be taught as part of the school curriculum so as to secure a democratic and humanistic future for the Czech Republic.

Civic education should also help students develop the ability to think critically, as well as participate fully in the development and of a democratic society in the Czech Republic. Students should to be able to identify and explain the importance of the political rights guaranteed by the constitution, to develop and defend a list of responsibilities of a good citizen in democracy, to critique and discuss the variety of ways in which citizens may become active in the life of their communities, to identify and explain the importance of political participation in a democracy, and to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate forms of participation in a democratic society.

Civic education also should provide students with knowledge, skills, and attitudes which will lead to social and democratic participation and individual responsibility. Responsible citizenship requires individual understanding of responsibilities as well as rights, including the limitation of rights, so that the rights of others are respected and the survival of a democratic system is assured. Civic education should be centered on real human concerns, helping youth become more sensitive, caring and accepting of other members of society within a diverse community. It also should be more activity centered and made relevant to the lives of youths.

At the heart of civic education in a democratic society is the goal of promoting responsible participation in political and community affairs. Civic education should provide the opportunity to practice rights and responsibility.Improving citizenship education at the secondary level will better prepare Czech students to participate actively in building a pluralistic, democratic society, and will promote democratic relations among members of the school community, including students, teachers, school administrators and parents. The school has a very important role in civic education. The responsibilities begin with teaching the fundamental principles of democracy and making democratic ideals the foundation which the school culture is founded. The schools also need to provide a way for students to apply their knowledge through practicing democracy in the schools.

It has to be recognized that many Czech students in the past ranked civic education as one of their most boring subjects. For years it has been taught as a chauvinistic medium for exaggerated patriotism, as indoctrination for the new communist truth, and for purposes of political control. Students and others were wise to regard it as boring subject not worthy of their respect or attention. Another reason appears to be that the great intrinsic human interest in civic education is lost in the way it is taught. Teaching which focuses on names and dates rather than the great human interest content embedded in civics and history has missed the point. These civic content areas, such as pluralism, democracy, society, nationality, diversity, poverty, race, gender, conflict, tolerance, ecological crises,

crime, power relationships, wealth distribution, social responsibility and political philosophy are important content in any attempt to understand problems in a democratic society and citizen responsibilities within it. In addition civic education needs to help youth to develop deeply felt attitudes and values as they should think critically about their role in a democracy.

The long term isolation of Czechoslovakia from the developments in the social sciences that have taken place in the West has resulted in a stunted development of civic education. Czech participants in discussions on the content of civic education agree that the central aim of civic education is to provide students with the skills for individual responsibility and social participation. The goal of social science teaching, that developed from participant discussions, is to provide pupils with an understanding of the principles of a democratic society and to identify the fundamental values of a democracy. Extracurricular activities based in the civics curriculum help students to think critically, listen with discernment, and communicate with power and precision (Dostalova, 1993).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PLANNING CIVIC EDUCATION

One goal for civic education is to assist in the development of a modern curriculum unit to be taught within existing curriculum and to assist in the training of teachers for the implementation of these units. The rationale for this is that it is designed to better prepare teachers to help Czech students to actively participate in building a pluralistic democratic society while in the process promoting democratic relations among members of the school community which includes students, teachers, school administrators and parents. The benefit of this transformation is in the building of a stronger and more lasting democracy in the Czech Republic, and a beginning at building democracy throughout Eastern Europe. A strong Czech democracy will have great influence on Czech neighbors, and the development of a strategy to teach civic education in a way that is relevant, valid, and effective will influence and reinforce stronger democratic participation in Eastern Europe and the Newly Independent States.

However, without innovations in teacher education, little is likely to happen. New teachers have to be trained, and new books and workbooks have to be written. This depends upon the desire and ability of pedagogy faculties to innovate, but the old problems of resistance to change and lack of perception of individual responsibility make the likelihood of such innovation open to question.

Recommendations for planning a national review of the teaching of civic education include the following activates:

- *A review of contemporary reform in civic education curriculum.*
- *Civic curriculum design, contextual analysis, rewriting curriculum components and planning strategies for implementation.*
- *Innovation in civic education instruction.*
- *Identifying opportunities through civic education to reduce ethnic tensions and developing an acceptance of diversity and tolerance of others views.*

The development of seminars for teachers, which would focus on the following:

- *Teaching tolerance through civic education.*
- *The families' role in civic education and how to get involvement (e.g. discussing civic issues as part of homework assignments).*
- *The rights, roles and responsibilities of every citizen in a pluralist democratic society.*
- *Civic participation: goals and objectives.*
- *Civic knowledge and skills: The nature of politics and government.*

Possible teaching components:

- *Teaching a course on legal documents using Czech political and history documents in conjunction with current Czech constitutional acts. This could counter the students tendencies toward superficial reading and encourage a deeper analysis of legal democracy.*
- *Encourage civic virtue through civic education by studying founding democratic documents which incorporate a philosophical teaching concerning human nature and civil society. Through this course, suggestions can be made for a curriculum explaining equality of opportunity in a diverse population.*

Activities should include seminars, field visits and discussions with noted civic education experts, and the preparation of a final version of draft material for test teaching in the Czech schools. Throughout these activities a workshop on formative evaluation is recommended to begin using questionnaires and survey methods to determine if the activities are meeting goals. Achievement of these goals will depend on collaborative opportunities for working with appropriate institutional personnel within educational institutions, the government ministries, and private agencies. Specifically, these outcomes include:

1. *Provide educators with a chance to examine issues in civic education and to implement innovative teaching practices and techniques in Czech schools.*

2. *Provide a central resource exchange service in the Czech Republic to assist institutions that seek assistance in providing expertise, information and materials for curricular development in civic education.*

3. *Provide a stable long-term educational environment for the training of educational professionals, including graduate study, specialized institutes and seminars, and extended study and research opportunities, involving a continuing program of academic exchange.*

4. *Provide an opportunity for other nations in transition to examine the progress and take from it what appears to be useful and applicable to another environment.*

Assessment can play a vital role in ensuring the success of the civic education program. The evaluation should be an on-going process that informs individuals and institutions from both countries about the progress and development of the program. Suggested basis guidelines for assessment are: Clearly identify instructional goals, integrate assessment with instruction, assess often and use a variety of techniques.

Civic education is concerned with common human values, including the values of democracy and citizenship. It may influence the environment in school. And it is possible to base extracurricular activities in Civics. These activities help the student to think critically, listen with discernment, and communicate with power and precision. All forms of civic education must provide students with basic knowledge about social issues to allow them to critically examine issues and put their understanding of democracy in perspective. Models of citizenship should be demonstrated in every institution in which the student is involved, especially at school. Education for citizenship means helping students make connections between what they learn and how they live.

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